

RESTORATION UPDATE

A newsletter on the Salton Sea Restoration Project

Salton Sea Authority

November 2003

Core Sampling at Salton Sea Complete Engineers Begin Analysis

Engineers are evaluating the results of the most extensive geotechnical investigation ever conducted at the Salton Sea and a design workshop has been set for December to determine the next steps in the restoration process.

More than 20 core samples were pulled from the floor of the ancient lake during a six-week period in September and October to determine the feasibility of constructing earthen dams.

"The sediments are softer than expected," said Dr. Bill Brownlie of Tetra Tech, a Civil Engineer and leader of the consulting team that was hired to undertake the investigation. He added that while there are methods to construct an earthen dam on soft sediments, engineers are also investigating other construction methods.

"We have a team of experts evaluating the samples," Bill said. "Some design concepts involve treating the foundation material rather than removing a layer of soft sediments. These will be discussed at the December workshop."

He added the impact on costs is not yet known.

The Salton Sea Authority's engineering team, with significant funding and technical support from the Bureau of Reclamation, is analyzing the core samples from as deep as 200 feet below the lakebed (up to 500 feet below sea level).

Interest is focused on the feasibility of constructing the earthen structures that would convert the Sea into a smaller lake that would be able to adapt to reduced inflows.

In order to proceed, the Authority needs to determine whether the lakebed can support the infrastructure. Until now, very little information has existed on sub-bottom conditions below the Salton Sea.

The Bureau of Reclamation developed a cooperative agreement with the Authority to perform these investigations. The Authority contracted with Tetra Tech and URS Corporation, environmental and engineering firms, to do the work.

The consulting team developed the study plan with extensive input from Federal Bureau of Reclamation and State Department of Water Resources experts.



Drill barge worker prepares derrick for core sampling at the Salton Sea.

Regional Water Quality Control Board

Urges Local Control of Restoration Efforts

SSA Board Hopes to Build Cooperation Between Federal/State/Local Agencies

The Regional Water Quality Control Board adopted a resolution in October calling for “local control” of efforts to restore the Salton Sea. The resolution urged that the Salton Sea Authority continue as the lead agency as it works with the Salton Sea Science Office, the Federal Bureau of Reclamation and the State of California. Other organizations and government agencies, including the Imperial Irrigation District, a member agency of the Salton Sea Authority, have passed similar resolutions.

“The Quantification Settlement Agreement for the Colorado River water users is finally a reality,” said Salton Sea Authority Board President Andy Horne, a member of the Imperial Irrigation District Board of Directors. “With the QSA comes promise that there will be significant revenues for Salton Sea restoration and significant pressure to implement restoration soon as the Sea’s inflows drop due to the water transfer.”

Horne and other Authority board members, however, are concerned that there will be a loss of local direction and momentum if Restoration work is from Sacramento.

“We believe the restoration of the Salton Sea is best led by locally elected decision makers in the Imperial and Coachella valleys and not state employees in Sacramento.”

“Over the past five years, it has been the Authority’s leadership – in partnership with the state and federal government – that has brought new focus and purpose to restoration of the Salton Sea. We think this should continue,” Horne said.

Hard fought gains were made for the Sea during recently concluded negotiations on the water transfer.

“We are concerned that some of the gains made, particularly the commitment of funding that passes through the State of California from a recent water bond and from the water transfer itself, may be diverted elsewhere or wasted if state efforts are not absolutely integrated with the Salton Sea Authority and our Federal, university and other partners’ efforts,” Horne said

“Additionally, we believe that our work on the pieces of a preferred restoration project – a deep-water lake, shallow water wetlands and water quality improvement features – puts us on the verge of identifying a preferred project,”

The Authority is concerned that the State’s process may “start from scratch,” which would substantially delay selection of a preferred project.

“While recent water transfer/Salton Sea state legislation provides some mechanisms for locals to render advice to a State led process through an Advisory Committee, as local governments know, there is no substitute for local decision-making,” Horne said.

The Regional Water Quality Control Board is concerned that recent State activities could result in a loss of decision-making by the Salton Sea Authority, potential duplication of effort by the State of California and a loss of momentum in selecting a preferred project.

The resolution also requests that member agencies, ex-officio members of the Authority, cooperating partners and other interested parties adopt similar resolutions. So far, the Imperial Irrigation District, the California Regional Water Quality Control Board, El Centro Chamber of Commerce, city of Imperial, and the city of Calipatria have joined the effort.

MEETINGS SCHEDULE

Board of Directors
December 18, 2pm
IID - La Quinta

Technical Advisory Meeting
January 8th, 10:30am
TBD

UPCOMING CONFERENCES

California Water Policy Conference
November 19, 2003
Los Angeles
Wilshire Grand Hotel

Colorado River Water Users Conference
Las Vegas
December 10-12, 2003

Salton Sea Authority

Plaza La Quinta
78-401 Highway 111, Suite T
La Quinta, CA 92253
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Salton Sea Authority Board members discuss multi-agency cooperation. From left, Peter Nelson, Andy Horne, Gary Wyatt and Roy Wilson

Financial Prospects for Restoring Salton Sea Take Another Positive Turn

Finance Plan Could Bring Billions of Dollars

Tax increment financing could provide the Salton Sea Authority with up to \$2.6 billion over the next 45 years, worth about \$500 million in today's dollars (present value), to fund the Salton Sea restoration project, according to a study discussed October 23 by the Salton Sea Authority Board of Directors.

This comes on top of recently signed water transfer agreement called the QSA that would provide about \$300 million for a Salton Sea restoration fund.

"Local revenues that will come from Seaside development provide one more, very important, piece to help complete the financial viability puzzle," said Authority Executive Director Tom Kirk.

The feasibility study was prepared for the Authority by the Rosenow Spevacek Group of Santa Ana. The Authority, a joint powers agency made up of the region's two water agencies and the counties of Riverside and Imperial, has been evaluating the potential of using redevelopment revenue generated from expected growth around the Sea to fund restoration efforts. The study evaluated the feasibility of forming either an infrastructure financing district or a redevelopment project area in the region.

Redevelopment districts are often used by cities and counties to improve "blighted" downtowns and other areas without raising taxes. The study proposes that the Salton Sea Authority use the same model at the Sea.

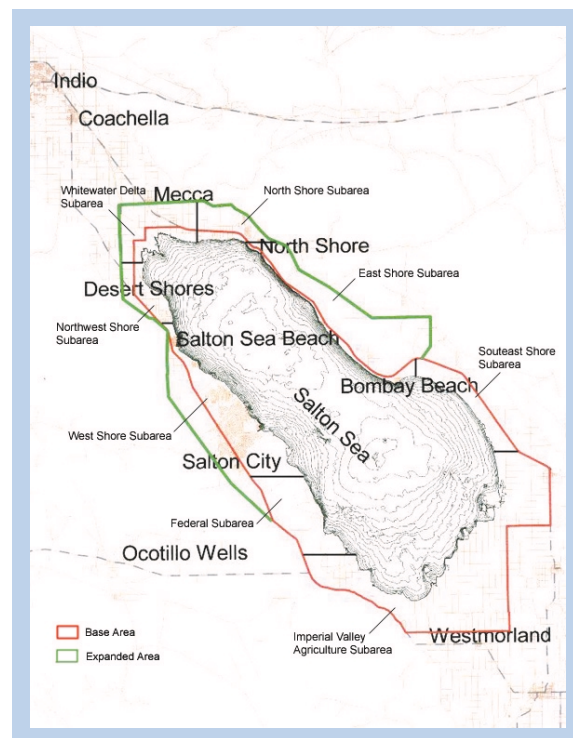
Fortunately, State law has already been adjusted to allow the Salton Sea Authority to do so. In 1999 then State Senator Dave Kelley introduced and successfully sought passage of a law that allows the Salton Sea Authority to form such a district.

The Rosenow Spevacek report's findings and projections include:

- Without a restoration project, property values and tax receipts will remain stagnant and provide little revenue to taxing entities.
- By modestly expanding the current Salton Sea Authority boundaries to take advantage of growth that would occur around the lake under various restoration scenarios, the amount of revenue that could be generated could double.
- Of the "restoration alternatives" evaluated, the Salton Lake concept has the most revenue potential, about \$2.6 billion or about \$500 million in today's dollars (net present value) under the expanded boundary condition.

The report recommends that the Authority consider expansion of its boundaries and take the next steps, including negotiations with taxing entities, to form an Infrastructure Finance District.

A complete copy of the report can be reviewed in the "Current News" section on the Salton Sea Authority website at www.saltonsea.ca.gov.



The Rosenow Spevacek Group suggests expanding the current district boundaries (green line).



Few other places on the planet support as diverse a bird population as the Salton Sea.